



Rainbow Hook-up, Jurassic Lake



LAGO STROBEL (a.k.a., JURASSIC LAKE), ARGENTINA

In southwest Argentina, in the high desert country just east of the Andes and the Chilean border, is found the sixty-five square kilometer, crystal clear, biological phenomena known throughout the trout fishing world as Jurassic Lake. From our experience here, everything about this fishery and environment could be described as surreal or extreme. It all begins with the rainbows which average a legitimate 6 to 7 pounds (and that is a very conservative estimation). Even though our personal experience didn't include anything larger than a weighed 15 pounder (and several others between 10 and 13#), many rainbows well over twenty pounds have been released.



The uniqueness of the Jurassic Lake rainbow fishery is created by the perfect marriage of rainbow trout and an unlimited freshwater shrimp food source. Eighteen years ago, someone discovered this lake provided the perfect habitat for freshwater shrimp and, for eons, they had been thriving and multiplying. There were no predators present, not a fish in the entire lake. They dumped 5,000 rainbows into the lake and what has happened since that time in 1993 has earned the nickname "Jurassic Lake."

We fished the lake using exclusively floating lines, although intermediate sink tips work equally well. Different versions of woolly buggers and streamers were the choice for flies, however, if the winds subsided, large dry flies could be presented to cruising fish which were easy to spot in many areas. We waded the shorelines to make our presentations – the wading was split between smooth, sandy bottoms and rocky shorelines.

The 35,000 acre estancia we fished from included ten kilometers of lake shoreline with eight kilometers of the Barrancoso River running across their property. They maintain a series of paths throughout the property that we accessed using ATV's (below, center).



THE BARRANCOSO RIVER

Strobel Lake has no outlets – the lake site is carved out of a large basin rimmed by rocky cliffs. There is one river which empties into the lake, the boulder strewn Barrancoso River. Since this river provides the only spawning area for the rainbows, it is an important element in the fishery. The fish enter the river twice each year, once in November and again in mid-March. From mid-January through mid-March, the big fish avoid the river due to a combination of low and warming waters.



When the large rainbows are in the river and the waters are clear (early season weather can muddy the stream), the fish can be sight fished with dry flies, New Zealand style. Arguably, this experience may be the finest wild rainbow stream fishing on the globe. This link takes you to a video of fishing the river filmed this season..... <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZINbpxo-dyw>

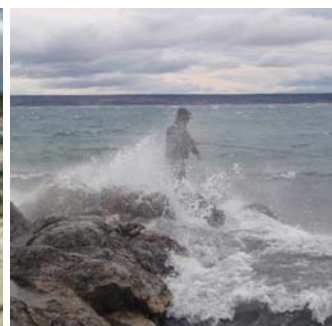
Obviously, this is timing sensitive. Adding sight fishing the river to the lake fishing definitely impacts the overall experience. Our visit took place in late January due to other calendar commitments in Argentina that we'd made prior to deciding on visiting Jurassic. On my visit to see the river, I was told we'd most likely not find any big fish since we were too late. We did find many small fish in the pools and riffles. After searching through four pools on the river, we did find one big fish finning in a slot in the fifth one (below, left – center of photo). Using a large dry fly, he attacked and ate it on the first drift and immediately shot upstream. After an electrifying 50 yard run, he stopped, turned, and the fly dropped free. Disappointed, the guide and I began the usual discussion about how big we thought he was. While discussing, we noted the fish was back in the same slot in the river. We gave him a 15 minute recovery period and tried again. First, we stripped a few streamers across his nose.....without a look. Next, we tied on a large nymph....the fourth drift was right in his window and he ate it. After a few more exciting runs, he tired and was in the net – beautiful rainbow in spawning color, third photo from the left below. One large fish in the river, two hook-ups with large fish, and one large fish netted and released – percentage-wise, doesn't get much better than that!

If one was going to fish Jurassic, I would suggest trying to get space when the river was in its prime time.



THE WEATHER

The weather is definitely an issue with high winds occurring almost anytime. The three photos below portray varying conditions which we encountered. On the left is the “dream day” which was my first full day. Almost no wind with a few hours when the lake had a glass-like surface (the largest six fish this day weighed a total of 51 pounds). The second photo was my third day – began calm and warm, but shortly after lunch, the winds picked up with gusts of 25 to 30mph. That afternoon was our best fishing session with fish of 15, 13, 11, and 10 pounds plus a few smaller ones. Jeff Reinke joined us on our fifth day and he brought with him the wrath of the



fishing gods with cooling temperatures and high winds (third photo). The one day we fished together (my fifth and last day) saw wind gusts which must have been in the 30-40mph range, but Jeff still managed to take nine fish with most in the 6 – 8# range and two double digit fish. Jeff's Jurassic visit coincided with a terrible weather pattern, but still he managed to take his personal best rainbow (12+#) as well as one genuine pig which ran like a runaway freight train, weighed ten pounds, and was just 25 inches long (above, right).

LOGISTICS AND OPTIONS

Jurassic Lake is about a six hour drive from the town of El Calafate. They are considering putting in an air strip at the estancia where we fished for next season that would take charter flights from Calafate and eliminate the drive. Calafate is a little over three hour flight south from Buenos Aires. The drive includes three hours on dirt and gravel, most of the dirt portion being Argentina Hiwy 40 which is in the process of being paved. Given the travel necessary to reach Jurassic, I would suggest a stay including four to five days of fishing and timing which includes fish being in the river.

There are direct flight connections from Calafate to Tierra del Fuego and Bariloche. Other sporting travel options include the giant sea run browns of the Rio Grande, the Patagonia areas from Esquel to San Martin, world class dove hunting, and the Golden Dorado fisheries of tropical northern Argentina.



LODGES

There are two primary operations fishing Jurassic. The more rustic one has accommodations by the river mouth and allows access to the lake and river via walking. The estancia where we stayed has a few more creature comforts (dining room photo below), but would still qualify as a remote fly fishing operation. They use ATV's to access the lake and river. The guides were excellent. Also, they have 15 lagoons on the property, most of which hold fish. Two of those lagoons are used for farming rainbows (one is pictured below – right). As testament to how rich the native fresh water shrimp (below on dime) food supply is, fingerling rainbows are put in this lagoon and two years later, without any other food supplements supplied, the fish are harvested at 16 – 18 inches long.



WILDLIFE AND MISCELLANEOUS



The creatures occupying this country are as strange as the land itself. The guanaco (above, left) is a large lama-like animal. Hares are plentiful as are red foxes which pursue them. The rhea (above, right-center) is a large ostrich-like flightless bird. And in the ultimate contradiction, this largely barren landscape is home to magnificent pink flamingos and graceful black neck swans – both of which feed on the shrimp. The “king” of this landscape is the puma, which is the top predator.

One morning, we visited a rocky cliff (below, center) which apparently was used by the ancient inhabitants of this land as a sort of school for teaching youngsters. Petroglyphs (carvings in the rock) are found all along this cliff face. At left is a puma pawprint and a guanaco carving is at right.



The bay where I had the most fishing success is pictured below, center. The white colored rocks are a sort of alkaline encrusted coral with a strange texture that was not rock-hard. We often found cruising fish on the sheltered left side of the bay.



PHOTO CREDITS: Jeff Reinke and Federico Wenzel (our guide)

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,
Don Muelrath
Fly Fishing Adventures
www.flyfishingadventures.org
888-347-4896
flyfish@napanet.net